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INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING CASEY/BUSH
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WASHINGTON

Vice President George Bush met with CIA Director William Casey Thursday in final preparation for a high-profile trip to the Persian Gulf given added impetus by concern over terrorism and the politics of oil.

The intelligence briefing from Casey and a last-minute review of logistics by his staff preceded an evening departure for Shannon, Ireland, the first refueling stop on a 10-day trip to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and North Yemen.

From Shannon, Bush was headed for Rhein-Main Air Force Base near Frankfurt, West Germany, for an overnight rest stop before his arrival Saturday in the Saudi capital of Riyadh.

The 10-day trip was characterized by administration officials as a mission of good will and reassurance to U.S. friends in the Arab world.

However, Bush created somewhat of stir in advance of his departure by indicating Tuesday he would appeal to the Saudis to halt the slide in oil prices that has inflicted economic pain on U.S. producers and his adopted home state of Texas.

The White House, in what presidential aides described as a clarification of those remarks, said Wednesday the administration would not interfere in the oil market and contended "the net effect" of the price plunge on the American economy "will be positive."

Beyond the controversy stirred by his comments on oil prices, Bush found a more ominous element to his trip highlighted Wednesday by the bomb explosion that killed four Americans aboard a TWA jetliner bound from Rome to Athens.

The fresh fears spawned by that bombing and precautions against threats hurled by Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy after the military confrontation in the Gulf of Sidra guaranteed security would be tighter than ever as Bush visited a region all-too-familiar with terrorism.

"Everyone is aware of the dangers of traveling in that part of the world," said Marlin Fitzwater, chief spokesman for the vice president. "We assume we will see tighter security. Just what steps the host countries will take, we don't know. The measures we do know of we won't divulge."

When asked Tuesday whether he had any heightened concern about his own safety because of the Libyan threat to retaliate against Americans in the Middle East, Bush replied, "None whatsoever."

During a trip to the southern flank of NATO last week, Secretary of State George Shultz received fighter escorts on flights from Ankara to Athens and Athens to Rome. It was not known whether similar precautions would be in effect for Bush.

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